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USDA Reports Increased Diversification in Horticulture Operations

WASHINGTON, Dec. 13, 2010 – The sales of food crops grown under protection in the United States more than doubled in the last decade as U.S. horticultural operations are becoming more diverse and taking advantage of newly emerging agricultural trends, according to results of the 2009 Census of Horticultural Specialties released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

“Despite the recent economic downturn, the U.S. horticulture industry as a whole is showing resilience by increasing diversification of the products produced,” said Joe Prusacki, NASS Statistics Division director. “Food crop production has shown the largest growth in this sector of agriculture, possibly a link to increased consumer interest in fresh fruits and vegetables.”

The sale of food crops grown under protection, including fruits and vegetables in hothouses, as well as transplants for commercial vegetable production increased 149 percent since the last time the census of horticulture was conducted in 1998. In 2009, growers reported \$553 million in sales of food crops grown under protection, up from \$223 million. Total sales of transplants for commercial vegetable production increased from \$156 million to \$331 million during this same period.

“Overall, total sales of horticultural crops between 1998 and 2009 increased by 10 percent to \$11.7 billion,” added Prusacki. “Looking at the entire agricultural industry however, this 10-percent increase lags behind the 60-percent increase seen for all agricultural crop commodities during this same time period.” Colorado’s value of sales increased 2.4 percent from 1998 to \$205 million.

The census results also show a more than average sales increase for bedding plants, nursery stock and propagative materials. A downturn in sales however was documented for cut flowers down 21 percent, foliage plants down 14 percent and cut Christmas tree sales down 3 percent.

The Census of Horticultural Specialties provides the only comprehensive, detailed data on U.S. floriculture, nursery and specialty crop production at the national and state levels. It provides information on the number and types of establishments, value of sales, varieties of products, production expenses and more. Complete results of the 2009 Census of Horticultural Specialties are available online at www.agcensus.usda.gov.

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